Clallam Conservation District
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Soil Testing Program

The Basics of Soil Testing

Soil testing is a tool used to help make informed decisions about the management of soil nutrients—whether for a garden, lawn, field, or forest. Soil tests provide information on fertilizer needs, helping to save money and time. Soil tests can also help protect the environment from contaminated runoff or groundwater pollution caused by over-fertilization.

Soil tests should be taken in the spring or fall for established sites, and at any time of year for new seedings and plantings. Taking a soil test every two to three years is usually adequate to monitor nutrient levels; however, if management practices change, testing more frequently may be necessary.

Soil will be tested for: pH, nitrate-nitrogen, phosphate, potassium, magnesium, calcium, sodium, organic matter, and cation exchange capacity.

How Can We Help You?

1. Using the steps below as a guide, sample the soil that you would like to be tested. If you need any help with this process please call or stop by our office.
2. Return your soil to our office, along with **$16 per sample** to cover the costs of the lab testing. We will then send your sample to a certified lab to be tested.
3. About 2 weeks later, when we receive your soil test back from the lab, we will give you a call to come pick up the results. We can then help you interpret the results and determine how to proceed with any recommendations made by the soil-testing lab.

How To Take A Soil Sample

Supplies Needed

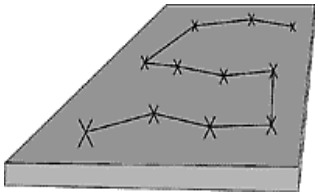
(Tip: Be sure your supplies are clean to avoid contaminating your sample)

⇒ Spade, shovel, or soil probe
⇒ Knife
⇒ Bucket
⇒ Soil testing bag, plastic Ziploc bag, or small paper sack

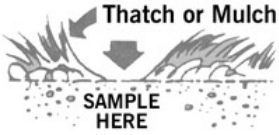
A Sample Should Represent the Area

Each sample should typically consist of about 10 to 15 sub-samples taken from random locations within the sampling area.

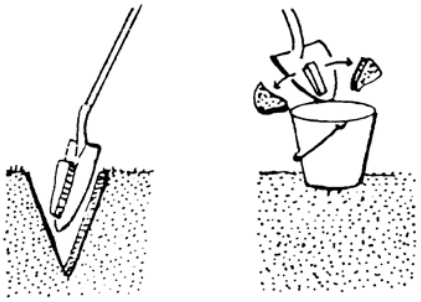
Tip: Avoid sampling unusual spots, such as manure piles or swampy areas. Separate samples should be taken if areas are managed differently, or is soil type of slope are different.



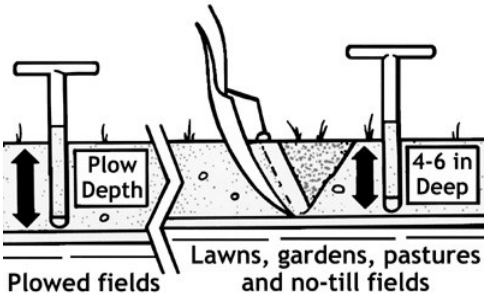
Step 1: Remove vegetation and organic material on the surface of the area to be sampled



Step 2: Take soil samples to the correct depth using the proper method



If you use a shovel, dig a hole 4 to 6 inches deep. Take a slice of soil 1/2 inch thick and 4 to 6 inches deep, and keep it on the shovel. Using a knife, from the center of the slice cut a strip 1/2 inch wide from the top to the bottom and put it in your bucket. Repeat this step at each sampling site.



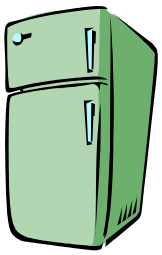
Most soils should be sampled at a depth of 4 to 6 inches, unless you have plowed your soils or have a hardpan near the surface.

Step 3: Mix and package the soil sample

Thoroughly mix the sub-samples in the bucket. Break up any large clumps of soil.

Fill the soil sample bag to the line indicated on the side of the bag. Samples can also be put in plastic or paper bags and filled with 2 cups of soil.

Step 4: Bring your soil sample to our office. We will take care of the rest!



Tip: Place your soil sample in your refrigerator if you can't get it to us within 24 hours. This prevents continued breakdown of nutrients, which can lead to inaccurate test results.

Clallam Conservation District has no intention of competing with private testing labs, and offers this service in response to a perceived need for affordable soil testing. A list of private testing labs in the Northwest is available to anyone who requests it.